

Jenny Younger's breasts, if Nick were to give a considered and apt opinion, were finely veined and sloppy. *Sloppy*, in the sense they were large and floppy while being ill-clothed and well past their prime. If Nick remembered correctly, they had reached their prime by the junior prom. They were also *sloppy*—to put it more bluntly—as in *sloppy sex*. A man sitting in a booth in a dingy bar three-quarters drunk by sunset and getting a foot job by a sexed-up local who has come to the bizarre realization that she has caught a big fish in a small pond ... this man, any man, in this situation, could feel the heat of sloppy sex, correctly neologized, coming his way.

"I was always one to get cleaned up first," Jenny Younger said. "I mean at least a quick dab and wipe in the damp, dark bits before letting someone give it a lick."

That one got an arched eyebrow from Nick. "Are you prepping me for some eminent shock? Some classic Kama Sutra move you're bent on?"

"And Danny was all, 'Now, woman!' you know? Straight from work, all sweaty and stinky. You know you can get a urinary-tract infection with much less."

"... Much less?"

"You got to keep it clean."

"That's what the preacher says."

But Jenny Younger was not clean. She was foul. "You are foul in all ways," Nick told the smiling woman, her mind oblivious and filled with podiatric purpose. A dab and a wipe. Was licking her damp, dark bits going to be part of the evening? Was it going to be a *required* part of the evening? Introducing his bare backside to her kitchen table, a threat and a promise she clearly had used before as part of her arsenal of womanly charm,

had in a manner of seconds gone from heating up his midsection to souring the whole bacterized tryst.

“What did you ... who’s ... what?” Jenny Younger’s eyes were beginning to wander, trying very much to land on Nick’s face. When they did, they would twinkle, reminding Nick of that girl in high school.

“But you still have a certain cuteness about you.”

Jenny worked her foot. “Yeah, and you’re all kinds of cute. You know you’ll be my triple?”

Nick looked about the empty bar and then back to Jenny. He shook his head.

“My triple. James, Calvin, and now you.”

As would be the case, James was way ahead of the game and had ravaged Jenny Younger’s perfect eighteen-year-old body out on Rocky Point during a summer vacation. How long did it last with James, he wondered?

“About three hours.”

“No. I mean the relationship.”

“...?”

Well, it was longer than Nick was preparing to give. The interesting story, though, was the tryst with Calvin. She and Calvin dated seriously for a few years just after his suicide attempt. To all concerned, her affection seemed overdone. He seemed to be a new toy.

“You didn’t know me and Calvin were at it?”

“Jenny Younger, you are just too much.”

“I was working at the Jackson Diner and he started coming in for lunch every day. He was so damn nice and so funny. There he was with that fresh scar on his head, acting like everything was right with the world. And he believed it, you know? Started making me believe the world was okay. But, of course, that’s a bunch of bullshit. Let me tell you, this world ain’t okay.”

Nick squinted at her. “You *are* foul.”

Jenny leaned in. “What are you saying?”

“I’m saying, I think Calvin is right, that the world is okay. It’s our relationships that are bullshit. Sit on your porch, watch the clouds pass by, enjoy yourself—you aren’t taking it with you.”

“‘You can’t take it with you.’ That’s in the Bible.”

“Well, yeah, sort of. So piss on those who ruin the trip. Calvin takes it easy. We should all be so lucky.”

“Piss on ’em!”

“So why, most foul woman, did you part ways with the little brother?”

“What are you saying? ... Did you say foul?”

Nick reached across the booth and snapped his fingers just before her eyes and pointed at her nose. “To the point! Why did you dump my poor, innocent, babe-in-the-woods brother?”

“I didn’t dump him. He started going out with some other chick from Harrisburg. He didn’t even tell me. Just stopped calling. Found out through the grapevine I’d been screwed in more ways than one. I gotta pee this instant. You want to go, or get another

pitcher?” Jenny removed her foot from his very soft member and walked barefoot across the tavern and into the restroom.

Nick knew Calvin was not celibate; James and Peter kept him informed of Calvin’s love life—a love life that indeed sounded a lot like Jenny’s story, but Nick just didn’t know they were with women like Jenny, that they were with women as attractive as Jenny. Calvin clearly could be a bit much with anyone, let alone a woman, and having a misshapen head led one to certain conclusions that were often less than favorable. Nick had always assumed people like Calvin attracted people who had faced the facts of their lives and learned to approach and reciprocate with their own kind. Was that cruel? Insensitive? Yes, but was it true?

Nick gathered Jenny’s things and paid the bar tab. The bartender’s snaggletoothed grin and difficulty making change brought Arnie the Carny’s trailer to mind. Nick imagined Jenny laying her bare backside on Arnie the Carny’s kitchen table, which then brought the unasked-for image of Arnie’s bare backside on the kitchen table. Nick turned back to the bartender. “Do you have any breath mints?”

The bartender yelled down the bar. “Don’t let her throw up in here. Jenny! Don’t you throw up in here!”

Jenny had backed up against a bar stool and put her hands on her thighs, getting ready. Nick approached her, keeping a wide angle, offering her shoes as a goad. “Put on your shoes, don’t put on your shoes, throw up, don’t throw up; I’m gonna take off.”

“Whoa, dude!” The bartender wasn’t going to allow it. And he meant it. “It’s not nine o’clock and she’s fucking wasted. You’re taking her home.” Nick looked across the bar and considered his options. He tried his cold, *Don’t even mess with me look*. It didn’t

work. “What, I know you’re a fucking Taylor. I don’t care. You get her liquored up, you get her the fuck out of here.”

“What does being a Taylor have to do with it?”

“Fuck you and your family.”

Nick took a step back. He looked around at the empty bar. Everything was fine. Everything had been fine. “Are you kidding me? What the hell is your problem?”

“Do the right thing, Taylor. Just for once, I’d like to hear that a Taylor did the right thing.”

“Dude, I’ve never seen you in my life. What the hell are you going on about?”

The bartender bent for something under the bar. “Have it your way, asshole.” He lifted a bat and pointed it at Nick.

Nick took a moment and then looked back at Jenny. “Put on your shoes. This guy’s planning on beating my ass for no goddamn reason.”

Just outside the bar, Nick let go of Jenny’s arm to put on his sport jacket, and she immediately succumbed to an unseen vortex. She put out a flailing arm for Nick to take hold, but it was too late. On she went, backpedaling at an unbridled speed, turning at the last moment only to go down on palms and knees, her purse and its contents skittering across the pavement. After barking to a quick stop, she rolled onto her side, simultaneously moaning and laughing and holding palms and knees. Finally she rolled all the way into the gutter, save her lower left leg.

Nick lit a cigarette and blew out a large cloud. Except for the splayed leg, she had found the same location and taken the same position he had chosen earlier in the day.

“Are you all right, Jenny?”

She said yes and that she needed to lie still for a few minutes.

Nick sat on the curb and took in the dark and empty square. Jenny had a good scrape on her left leg, but that seemed to be all. And except for an exposed breast and her skirt riding up—displaying a rather lacey red thong—her fall was more dramatic than violent. Nick patted her ankle and told her to hang in there. “A few more years of nights like these, and it’ll be over.”